

# Tips for Successful Line Learning



**Georgette Vale, a member of NODA society Wymondham Players in Norfolk, takes us through her top tips for the very important, but often very difficult task, of learning your lines.**

There is no right or wrong way to learn lines and everyone is different. People often ask me how I go about line learning so I thought I would set pen to paper - or in this case, fingers to keyboard - and share this with you. My qualification for writing this article and starting the debate is that I have a lifetime (so far) on the amdram circuit and my professional work in the field of sensory impairment involves a lot of teaching skills.

One of the things my experience has taught me is that **every year that goes by it gets harder to learn new things**. In my twenties I never had to work at learning lines. In my thirties and forties I had to make more of an effort and now I make sure that I put in a lot more time than I ever did.

We all know that it's important to learn our lines because **we don't want to look stupid in front of an audience**, but I think the second most important reason is as a **courtesy to other actors**. We all realise that other people rely on the cues that we give them, and without that the production won't work. Another reason for good line learning is the **flow of the rehearsal and ultimately the flow of the play**.

**The right time to learn your lines is debatable**. I find it most useful to start learning when we have done a couple of runs and I have a better idea of how the director wants me to deliver my lines and I know how my cues will sound. Line learning also goes hand in hand with characterisation. If you know and understand the character then that can help with line learning because you know why your character is saying what they are.

In the days before highlighter pens I used to underline my lines with red biro using a

ruler. For the last thirty years I have always felt that if my lines are not highlighted in pink then I can't learn them well. If I have a script sent to me in a word document then I like to **highlight my lines in bold font**. The most invaluable aspect of electronic scripts is that you can take them with you wherever you go on your tablet or phone.

**Getting someone to read your lines with you** is also invaluable, if you have someone who can do it effectively. If not it can be more trouble than it's worth. It is not something that can be forced on friends or family. My stepsons are very willing and good at it when they are available. You need someone who is able to do it fairly blandly - unless they are also in the cast and know how your cues are intoned.

Some people like **recording the script in audio version**, usually to play in the car. I don't always find this useful as there are always other considerations, such as having to concentrate on the road. Having said that I do have plays that I use recordings for, and rather than really listen to them I just let them wash over me, and this does help a bit.

I find that time spent on **public transport** is good for line learning. Train journeys are excellent for me as I just sit in a corner muttering to myself. For bus journeys I spend a bit of time at the bus stop working out which bits I am going to run through in my head when I get on the bus. Just be a bit careful - I have been so wrapped up in the play in my head that I have forgotten I am actually on a bus.

**Prompts and prompting are essential parts of the learning process**. The best prompters are in at the beginning of the rehearsal period so that they know the pauses and how different people like to be prompted. The most important advice I can give you, and urge you to insist on others doing it too, is to "take the prompt and get on with it." If you need a prompt - and we all do - don't panic or beat yourself up about it. Sometimes I see people who are mortified that they need to have a prompt, but most prompts are needed through momentary lapses of concentration and not through lack of learning. Perhaps the audience do notice that a prompt has been given, but if it is taken quickly they soon forget it.

On the day of the performance I have my own little routines. I like to know I have gone through my lines several times in the day. I like to get changed early and then pace around with my script in my hand. People always say to me it's "too late to learn it now", but I am not learning it at this stage. I am not even trying to remember what comes next, I am just reading it. It's each to their own at this point. ★